

Michel, Biden join chorus calling for Regan's removal

By Jeremiah O'Leary
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Two congressional leaders called yesterday for the ouster of White House Chief of Staff Donald T. Regan, prompting renewed speculation that Mr. Regan won't survive the furor surrounding the Iranian arms sales scandal.

But Nancy Reagan, who is reported to have been angered by Mr. Regan's handling of the affair, denied that she has asked for his dismissal.

"I've made no recommendations at all," she said in response to questions from reporters during a White House Christmas tree ceremony.

Asked whether Mr. Regan should retain his post, the first lady replied: "I think that's up to my husband. It has nothing to do with me whatever."

House Republican leader Robert Michel became the second congressional GOP leader this week to suggest Mr. Regan leave the White House.

"I guess if I were in a similar situation, I personally would" step down, Mr. Michel said on NBC's "Today" show. "I would have felt that I let the president down."

Sen. Joseph Biden, a Delaware Democrat who is expected to be chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee when the new Congress convenes in January, said Mr. Regan and CIA Director William Casey

should both step down.

"I believe that Casey and the chief of staff will serve the president best by no longer serving him," Mr. Biden told the National League of Cities in San Antonio, Texas.

Other congressional leaders, including Sen. Richard Lugar, Indiana Republican, have made similar re-

marks amid mounting criticism of Mr. Regan's handling of the Iranian arms controversy that has besieged the White House.

But Mr. Regan still has substantial support among some Republicans on Capitol Hill.

"I don't see that it would serve any purpose at this time" for Mr. Regan to resign, said Senate Republican leader Robert Dole.

Sen. Alan Simpson and Rep. Dick Cheney, both Wyoming Republicans, are also urging Mr. Regan to stay.

Mr. Regan, who will turn 68 later this month, has not been asked to resign by President Reagan, said White House spokesman Larry Speakes.

"Regan is here, he is on the job, he has expressed no intention of leaving," Mr. Speakes said.

According to Mr. Michel, the chief of staff's future was not discussed at a White House meeting yesterday with the president, his top aides and GOP congressional leaders.

The credibility crisis rocking the Reagan administration inevitably involved Mr. Regan, who nearly two years ago assumed what many regard as single-handed control of information reaching the president from his advisers.

In recent weeks, Mr. Regan has denied published reports that he knew of funds being diverted to the

Nicaraguan resistance forces.

A senior administration official said Mr. Regan would resign "in a second if he thought leaving would help abate the situation and help President Reagan."

But the official said it appeared that the White House will face six months of continued public furor regardless of whether Mr. Regan leaves.

Another informed source said he believed Mr. Regan's prospects for remaining are good in the short term but might change when the new session of Congress begins in January.

Still another senior official said Mr. Regan would be departing his post shortly.

The expectation in some quarters is that Mr. Regan, second in power only to the president, will make the move of his own volition because of the growing clamor for a clean sweep of White House officials who were involved in the secret National Security Council negotiations with Iran.

Mr. Regan has admitted that he took part in the White House decision to ship arms to Iran.

The Iran-Contra deal is expected to be investigated in separate probes by an independent counsel, a Reagan-appointed Special Review Board and at least nine congressional committees. The scandal already resulted in a shake-up at the NSC with last week's resignation of Vice Adm. John Poindexter as na-

tional security adviser and the firing of NSC aide Lt. Col. Oliver North.

Mr. Regan and his group of hand-picked aides have been in on every major White House initiative. NSC staff members privately are bitter about about what they consider interference by Mr. Regan in national security matters.

Adm. Poindexter's replacement, Frank Carlucci, who was named to the post on Tuesday, obtained assurances from the president that he would not be required to report through the office of the chief of staff before accepting the job.

But Mr. Speakes disputed accounts of Mr. Regan's so-called one-man rule.

"The NSC reports directly to the president" and any national security

advice reaches the president "unfiltered by the chief of staff," he said.

"Mr. Regan has done everything to see that the president gets the facts and I think he deserves credit," Mr. Speakes said.

Mr. Regan was chief executive officer for Merrill Lynch, the Wall Street securities firm, before joining the Reagan administration as Treasury secretary in 1981.

Mr. Speakes is expected to become a public relations executive at Merrill Lynch's New York headquarters sometime next year.

There is little evidence that Mr. Regan was involved in secret funding of the Nicaraguan resistance. However, the chief of staff nearly always sat in Adm. Poindexter's

daily intelligence briefings to the president. His critics have said it is difficult to imagine any such deal going forward without Mr. Regan's knowledge.

Mr. Regan has a tough style and has made himself master of the details of running the government for a president who has delegated power to key subordinates throughout his political career.

The president is well known for his reluctance to fire people. But he agreed to replace former Secretary of State Alexander Haig, former Secretary of Health and Human Services Margaret Heckler and, last week, to dismiss Col. North. Even after sending Col. North back to active duty in the Marine Corps, Mr. Reagan called him a "national hero."